

2 February 2022

Athina

**By email:** fyi-request-17972-c157a36a@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Athina

**Official Information Act Request Nucleic acid being test by PCR test**

On 24 January 2022 you sent a request for information under the Official Information Act 1982 to the Ministry of Health, who partially transferred your request to ESR on 27 January 2022. The partial request transferred to ESR was as follows:

*As the PCR test does not differentiate between covid variants, how many of the positive PCR tests from 18th December 2021 were sent for genomic sequencing to determine that the variant was Omicron. Also please advise me what organisations carry out the genomic sequencing and provide me with the raw data that was used to determine this.*

**Our response to your request:**

***As the PCR test does not differentiate between covid variants, how many of the positive PCR tests from 18th December 2021 were sent for genomic sequencing to determine that the variant was Omicron.***

Between 18 December 2021 and 26 January 2022, a total of 2,489 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported. Of these, whole genome sequencing was performed for 1,580 (63.5%) cases. Of these 1,580 cases for whom whole genome sequencing was performed, 569 (36.0%) were confirmed to be of the Omicron variant.

It should be noted that whole genome sequencing may be attempted in the future for some of the cases not yet sequenced (e.g., those reported in recent days). Furthermore, it is not always possible to perform whole genome sequencing on all samples (for example, if the case has a low viral load). The number presented above may be an underestimate of the true number of cases of the Omicron variant.

***Also please advise me what organisations carry out the genomic sequencing and provide me with the raw data that was used to determine this.***

ESR carries out the genomic sequencing and the raw data that is submitted to the global initiative on sharing all influenza data (GISAID) (<https://gisaid.org/>) as per the Ministry of Health agreement.

The CoV-Spectrum website supports the identification of new SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern and the tracking of known variants as well as providing a publicly accessible feed for all data deposited on GISAID over time per country:

<https://cov-spectrum.org/explore/New%20Zealand/AllSamples/Past6M>

**Your right to seek a review**

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Thank you for your request.

Yours sincerely



Jill Vintiner  
**Joint General Manager Health and Environment - Health  
ESR**